

# **A True Money Tree**

*A Chinese Folktale*

By M. A. Jagendorf and Virginia Weng

In years gone by, there lived an old Chinese man by the name of Li. He had two sons, Long Life and Good Life.

Long Life's mother had died when he was a young boy, and Li had been lonely without a wife in the house. So he had married again, and when she gave him a son, he named him Good life, for life in his house was good. But alas! The new wife did not like Long Life, so she made him do all the hard work in the house and in the fields and garden. But Long Life was an obedient son and did not complain. He did all that had to be done while his stepmother and brother looked on.

When he was seventeen years old, his father died, and his life with his stepmother was made even harder than it had been before. Although he did all the work in the house and fields, he was scolded all the time. No matter how much he tried to please his stepmother, she was always finding fault with him. She was always thinking of ways to get rid of him.

So one day she said, "You are old enough to be on your own now. We should divide the land your father left. Your brother is still young, and he can stay with me. We should each live in our own home, then there will be no quarrel between us."

Long Life agreed to this and left the division of property to his stepmother. She took the house and the best fields around it for herself and her son. To Long Life she gave a barren piece of land on a hill far from the village.

Long Life did not complain. He built himself a little hut and began clearing the land and plowing and planting on it. He cut some firewood and little by little he grew enough food to support himself nicely.

With Long Life gone from the house and the land where he had done all the work, there was no one to do it. Good Life and his mother were lazy and careless, so they became poorer and poorer. One day the mother said to her son, "Look we have a fine house and good land and your brother lives in a hut on a piece of barren and hilly land, but he is getting richer and we are getting poorer. I am sure your father left him something of which we did not get our share. Son, go to your brother and make him tell you the truth, and ask him why he is getting rich and we are becoming poor. Tell him if he got something from his father we don't know about, he must give us at least half of it."

Good Life came to his brother in his little hut and said, "Brother, did our father give you some treasure we don't know about? We have fine land and you have a rocky barren piece—how is it that you are doing so well and we so poorly? You have plenty of everything and we have nothing. Did our father leave something you are hiding from us? We want our share of it."

"Brother, you're right. Our wise father left me a wonderful treasure—a money tree. It has two trunks and there are five branches on each trunk. All my food and clothing depend on that wonderful tree. From that tree I will always get enough money to live in good health and pleasure....It—"

Good Life broke in, “Where is that tree? Where are you hiding it?”

“I am not hiding it. It is with me all the time on my little piece of land, in my garden, and I am always there working at it. It gives me food, drink, and clothes and anything else I need, and if you—“

Before he could finish his words, Good Life rushed out and ran to his home. “Mother, Mother,” he cried, “you were right. My father left a money tree that will give us money for all we need, but Long Life took it. He told me. It will give money for food, clothes, an everything else we need.”

“I knew we were cheated,” she cried. “Run to Long Life’s orchard and dig up that money tree and plant it in our garden. It should be here.”

Good Life did not need any coaxing. He found a spade and ran to Long Life’s garden. He searched for a long time until he found a tree with two trunks and ten branches. He worked hard digging it up. Then he dragged it to his mother’s garden and there he dug a deep hole and planted the tree, watering it well. Day after day he watered the tree and shook it hard—but no money fell from it.

Then Good Life went back to his brother in anger and cried, “I took a tree with two trunks and ten branches from your garden, and planted it in our garden, watered it and took care of it, but no money falls from it. Did you tell me the truth?”

“Dear brother, I told you the truth—but you did not wait to hear the end of what I had to say. My money tree can never be stolen. It is my two arms and hands. The arms are the trunks and the fingers are the branches. Use them for planting trees and crops and to do all other work. Then money will come from them, and that will get you everything you need. My arms and hands are my fortune and I call them my money tree. You have a money tree, too. Put it to work as I do, and you will have all the money you need to buy whatever you want.”

Good Life went home to his mother. On the way he had been thinking of his brother’s words. “Mother,” he said, “now I have the true money tree and....” He put his hands to work and soon he and his mother reaped money from that tree for food and everything else, just as his brother did.

#### Reference:

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